

Exploding Gun Leaves Scar

[The author of this story asked to remain anonymous.—Ed.]

In August 2004, while on leave, I went with my father and three brothers to a shooting range just outside of Reedsport, Ore. We planned to hold target practice with my father's weapons—a 9-mm pistol and a .38-caliber revolver.

My oldest brother was using one of my father's other handguns about 25 yards down the shooting range. Meanwhile, my father was standing behind me, watching my form and helping me with my sights. I loaded the 9-mm pistol and fired it until the clip was empty; then, I switched to the revolver. After loading it, I shot twice. Before pulling the trigger the third time, I noticed something wasn't quite right but couldn't stop myself from firing again. On the third pull of the trigger, the weapon misfired and blew up in my face.

In reaction, I leaned to the ground, set down the weapon, and took off my glasses. My father had his back turned to me, but, when I bent forward, he turned around and saw I was on the ground, holding my forehead. He immediately turned me over and removed my hand to look at my face, then shouted to my oldest brother to get me into the truck. My brother ran to help me stand up and guided me to my dad's truck. The rest of my family got together and escorted me to the hospital.

On the way, we were able to reach a 911 operator and tell him what had happened. By the time we reached the hospital, about a five-minute drive, the staff already had a gurney waiting for me. The doctor who examined me didn't think any metal was imbedded in my skull but did a CAT scan anyway, which proved his theory correct. I escaped with nothing but a small scar on the bridge of my nose.

After I had found out I was going to be all right, my sister-in-law came into the examination room and told me that her sons had promised her they never



would play with guns. This news put a smile on my face, and, even though my head was pounding like a Mack truck just had rolled through it, I realized my situation could have been much worse. I was glad my little nephews had seen that guns are not toys and should not be played with.

The next day, my dad invited his neighbor, who is somewhat of a gun expert, over to the house. He looked at the damaged weapon and determined the cause of the misfire likely to have been one of the bullets my dad had reloaded. The neighbor said that, if one of the reloaded bullets wasn't as heavy as the others, it could have caused the explosion. Officially, we probably never will know for sure why this incident happened, but I'll never forget the look on my brother's face when he saw me after the explosion occurred. It was a look I hope I never will see again.

The learning points are simple. First, guns are dangerous and should be treated as such. We honored safety that day in many respects, but I chose to wear my glasses, instead of safety goggles, which could have prevented the injury I sustained. Luck certainly was on my side; if any larger pieces of metal had blown into my face, even goggles would not have saved me.

Second, reloading bullets is a critical evolution, and procedures must be maintained to ensure safety. My father is very methodical and careful when he reloads ammunition, but, as we saw that day, it takes only one small error.

The most critical point is to learn from other people's mistakes. We had thought this was going to be just another day for our family to get together and do the things we love to do. It would have been if we only had followed all the recommended safety precautions for our activity. The next time, I will. ■